

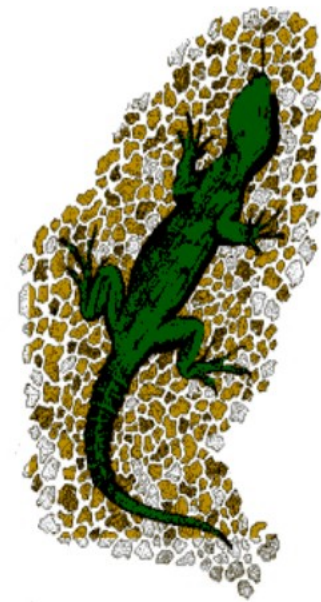
# GEEKOS ON PEYOTE: The Lost Sounds of The Cold Sun

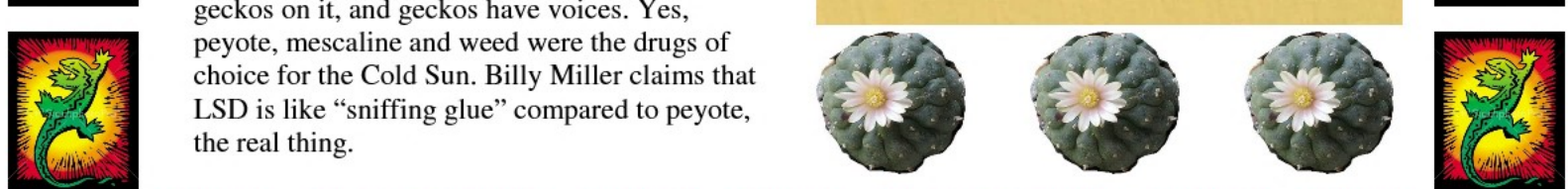
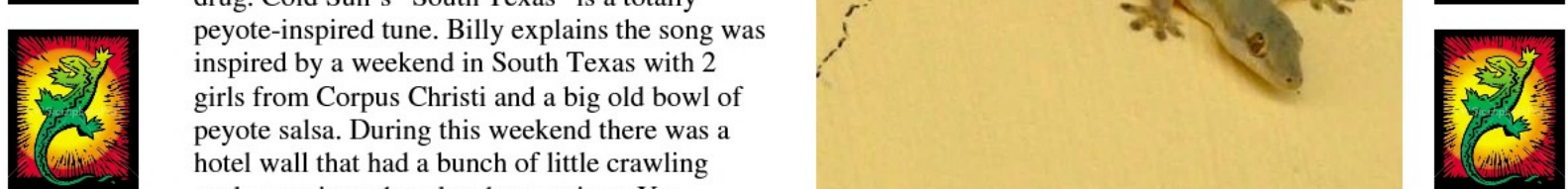
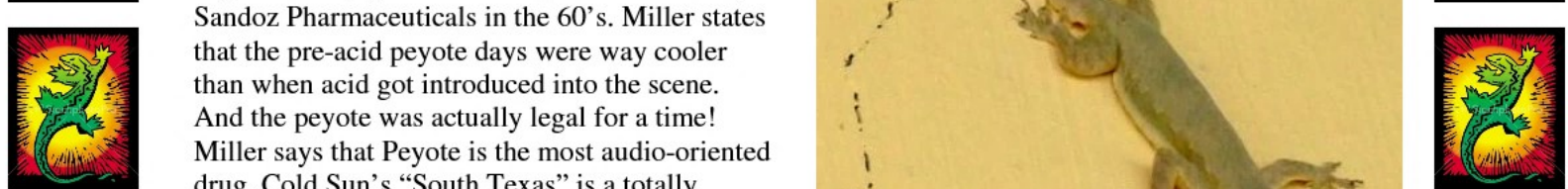
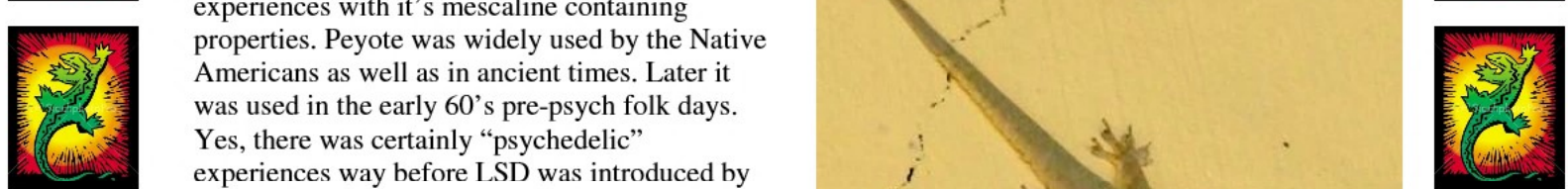
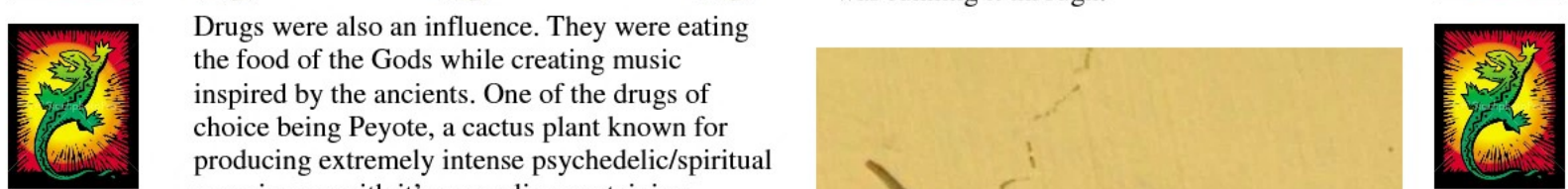


For this story we must once again travel way down south, to Texas, South Texas perhaps, maybe even to the desert amongst the cacti and lizards... Yes, back again to the Lonestar state and all the weirdness and great music that spawned from it. Many say it could have been the birth place of psychedelia. It was certainly the place to be in the mid 60's, with the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators and all of the Bohemian culture that surrounded the University of Texas, cheap rent as well as LEGAL (at the time) peyote at the Texas Ghetto apartments scene with characters like Tommy Hall and Powell St. John and many others. The early-mid 1960's was certainly an exciting place to be, a lot was going on at a very high rate of speed.

A bit young to have gone to the University of Texas, hang at the Ghetto and browse Tommy Hall's massive record collection, young Billy Miller still had his finger on the pulse of the goings on of the local music scene. Billy also had some very unique interests as a young guy. For one thing, Billy had very large pet lizards, and the lizard/reptilian element would play a role even later on as Billy's story unfolds.

Billy met guitarist Tom McGarrigle and in 1968 formed his first band "Cauldron," and John Kearney who had previously played in "The Spades," the pre-13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators Roky Erickson band, played drums for them. Cauldron was later switched to "Amethyst." As Amethyst, they played on a few occasions at the IL Club, a local psychedelic club in a rough part of town in Austin, Texas. The band name "Cold Sun" didn't come about until later, about half-way through the recording sessions for their album. The name "Cold Sun" comes from the Legends of Mu, which is one of the many influences of the band. Egyptian mythology, like the lost continent of Lemuria would be some influences to the band/lyrics. Mu, Lemuria was a lost continent in the Atlantic Ocean. Mu is considered to be one of the earliest civilizations, the people there were very influential, spiritual and of a very high consciousness, even with psychic abilities. It has even been said that the Lemurians developed telepathy. They were known to be organic, primarily vegetarian and were very much in harmony with the land. Cold Sun's "Ra-Ma" is about Lemuria/Mu.





A unique element to Cold Sun's music is the use of the electric autoharp, played by the band's leader/singer Billy Miller. Billy cites that he was not inspired by any autoharp players whatsoever and that the instrument itself was an inspiration/seeing what it could do that has not yet been discovered. Billy created his own design with the instrument and even attached a harmonica holder to it (as heard on "Fall" & "Ra-Ma"). Billy attached effects and things to it and was able to get an amazing span of different weird sounds out of this ever so unique instrument. Miller also cites being influenced by "Max Crook and Joe Meek, Ray Manzarek, John Cale, Lou Reed, & various horn players like Coltrane – squawky like horn sounds." Miller's Autoharp can sound like a grand piano at times, then get chaotic, even quite beautiful and melodic..... depending on how furiously he's hammering away at the strings as well as what types of effects that he was running it through.

Drugs were also an influence. They were eating the food of the Gods while creating music inspired by the ancients. One of the drugs of choice being Peyote, a cactus plant known for producing extremely intense psychedelic/spiritual experiences with it's mescaline containing properties. Peyote was widely used by the Native Americans as well as in ancient times. Later it was used in the early 60's pre-psych folk days. Yes, there was certainly "psychedelic" experiences way before LSD was introduced by Sandoz Pharmaceuticals in the 60's. Miller states that the pre-acid peyote days were way cooler than when acid got introduced into the scene. And the peyote was actually legal for a time! Miller says that Peyote is the most audio-oriented drug. Cold Sun's "South Texas" is a totally peyote-inspired tune. Billy explains the song was inspired by a weekend in South Texas with 2 girls from Corpus Christi and a big old bowl of peyote salsa. During this weekend there was a hotel wall that had a bunch of little crawling geckos on it, and geckos have voices. Yes, peyote, mescaline and weed were the drugs of choice for the Cold Sun. Billy Miller claims that LSD is like "sniffing glue" compared to peyote, the real thing.

Cold Sun's music does have some very other-worldly elements for sure. Tom McGarrigle's guitar playing could even at many times be compared to the sly, slithering crawling of a lizard. For me, the music certainly evokes a desert vibe. Imagine a dark desert at night with the breeze blowing, sand blowing around, lots of strange things and goings on, lizards crawling by doing their own thing not bothered by anything at all. Yes, the music certainly transports you into another place, and I like going to the desert, especially at night. The music can be chaotic, captivating, and at many times just absolutely beautiful. "Here In The Year" nearly brings me to tears when I hear it, it's a piece of music that moves me to that point. Billy says the song is a "prediction of the internet." It almost sounds like a warning in a way, of what's to come. The music surely is ahead of it's time.



John Ike Walton of the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators told a man named Bill Josey about Cold Sun. Josey ran Sonobeat records. The record was recorded in 1970 right in Austin, Texas, so you're getting a 100% pure, authentic psych/lost/classic gem recorded right in Austin, Texas! There was much holding out from Sonobeat waiting to close a deal with Columbia. The deal never came. Apparently after the 60's, the record companies were looking for a different sound. Time works in strange ways sometimes and it can be a task to decode it! But it wouldn't be until almost 20 years later that the Cold Sun album would finally see the light of day! Rockadelic records talked back and forth with Billy Miller, Billy was very hesitant at first, not thinking the songs were up to par with something he'd want to release. After a while, Billy saw the uniqueness and quality of the Cold Sun recordings and agreed to let Rockadelic release the record in 1989. I guess musicians can be their own worst critics. The album is considered to be a lost psych classic from Texas, and it surely lives up to the hype! The World In Sound label from Germany would re-release a cd version of the Cold Sun Dark Shadows record in 2008, and the sound is superb.

After Cold Sun, in 1974 Billy Miller would go on to join Roky Erickson, forming Blieb Alien. Billy would play with Roky for many years. Later the name changed to Roky & The Aliens. Hey, maybe Billy Miller and Roky Erickson had a UFO experience during these years that made Roky in the early 80's, state that a martian had inhabited his body and have an official document notarized that he was an alien? Who knows.... And so the strangeness continues... Billy Miller still plays his electric autoharp, in the early 2000's he joined up with a band entitled Blood Drained Cows with Gregg Turner, formerly of the punk band The Angry Samoans.

**\*\*NEWS: There are 2 new upcoming releases in the works; COLD SUN – LIVE 1972 and a new Cold Sun album featuring the original members of the band (Tom McGarrigle, Billy Miller and Mike Waugh), the songs were written long ago for Cold Sun, but just now recorded, this new album will be entitled "Rites Of Osiris"\*\*\***

#### References:

- 1.) "Cold Sun, Austin's Lost Psychedelic Visionaries" by Patrick Lundonborg, [www. Lysergia.com](http://www.Lysergia.com), 2003
- 2.) "The Texas 60's Music Refuge" [launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/TheTexas60sMusicRefuge/](http://launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/TheTexas60sMusicRefuge/)
- 3.) "Cold Sun: The Secrets Of Time" by Mike Stax, Ugly Things Magazine, Issue #28, Spring 2009